

government might change its mind, that Gordon Brown will have the courage to act where Tony Blair has not? Can he allow himself to hope?

*The writer is senior counsel for Reprive*

### **ACTION**

Contact your Representative and Senators and ask them to close Guantanamo prison camp. Call the Congressional Switchboard at this Toll-Free number 866-340-9281 and ask for them by name or give the operator your zip code and s/he will find them for you.

# In Guantanamo, men shadow-box for their lives

Zachary Katznelson, *The Independent* (UK), 6/7/07

**H**ave your hopes dashed enough and you start to question if there is ever a way out.

Imagine that this is your world: a 6 ft by 8 ft cell where everything is steel - the walls, the floor, the ceiling, the toilet, the sink, the bed. Walk two steps in any direction and you hit a wall. There are no windows. The lights are on 24 hours a day. You are allowed out of your cell two hours a day, sometimes at 6am, sometimes at midnight. For those two hours, you are placed in a 6.5ft by 16.5ft outdoor cage with a deflated football. You can go weeks without seeing the sun.

**Local contact:**



Imagine five and a half years away from your family, your wife, your children. You can't call them. They can't visit. Mail takes months to get through. When it does, it is heavily censored. Imagine being beaten, stripped naked, humiliated, again and again and again. This is the life of my clients in Guantanamo Bay.

Since 2005, my colleagues and I at Reprive, a legal charity based in London, have been representing 37 prisoners in Guantanamo. Two of us have passed through the United States military's screening process and have been to the base. We are the only people in Britain who can actually go and talk to these men.

### **8<sup>th</sup> Day Center for Justice**



205 W. Monroe St., #500, Chicago IL 60606-5013  
312-641-5151 [8thday@claret.org](mailto:8thday@claret.org) [www.8thdaycenter.org](http://www.8thdaycenter.org)

Every time I visit them, the prisoners ask for just one thing: a fair trial. "I know mistakes are made," Jamil El Banna, a British refugee from Jordan, told me when we met last month. "I'm not upset about that. But why has it taken this long to correct them? I've been here for years and I've never seen a judge. Put me on trial. Just give me a chance. Doesn't anyone care that I'm an innocent man?"

No prisoner in Guantanamo will see a judge any time soon. On Monday, military judges threw out the charges against the only two prisoners actually charged with crimes. As a result, their trials are on hold and no one else's will start.

#### **PARTIAL LISTING OF SUICIDES AT GUANTANAMO**

- 23 persons attempted mass suicide in 2003
- Three prisoners committed suicide in 2006
- One person committed suicide in May 2007

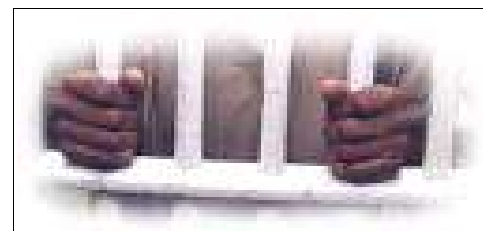
**Sadly, there is no question that trials in Guantanamo will be unfair. The judges can hear evidence gained from torture. They can sentence someone to death based on hearsay evidence - second, third or even fourth-hand information. The prisoner is not allowed to see the evidence against him. It's like shadow-boxing for your life.**

But despite the patent illegality of the trials, in the bizarre universe of Guantanamo, many of the men actually want to appear before a military commission. The prisoners look at David Hicks, an Australian citizen who pleaded guilty to supporting terrorism and was sent home to Australia to serve a nine-month sentence. They see this result, and they see hope. Maybe they too could cut a deal, whether they are guilty or not. They too could go home. The hell of Guantanamo would end. Then they learn of a ruling like the one on Monday. They are happy, because the process masquerading as justice has been exposed. But at the same time, it means yet another door has slammed shut. And as it does, it crushes that kernel of hope.

Have your hopes dashed enough and you start to question if there is ever a way out. Three men apparently took their own lives last year. Days ago, another man was found dead in his cell; the cause of death is unknown, though he had been on hunger strike for an extended period. Virtually all my clients have told me they have thought about killing themselves.

Despite the fact that they desperately want to be home with their families, despite the fact that Islam prohibits suicide, many have tried. I am a lawyer, but far too often, my role when I visit Guantanamo is social worker and psychologist. I am a poor tool in this regard, but I am all the men have.

Ahmed Belbacha seems to shrink a bit every time I see him. We meet alone in a claustrophobic, windowless room, monitored constantly by a video camera. You can hear the camera shift to track us if we change position. As he sits across from me, shackled to the floor, Ahmed is despondent. "My cell is like a grave," he said to me four weeks ago. He



tells me how everything echoes off those steel cell walls. Doors slam constantly as guards come and go. Large fans drone and screech. Even footsteps seem cacophonous. There is no such thing as quiet in Camp 6. There is no peace. "If I could just sleep..."

Ahmed has never been charged with a crime. He has never been before one of those military judges. Yet, finally, after five and a half years, Ahmed has been cleared to be released. He should be celebrating. But his nightmare may just be beginning. Ahmed is originally from Algeria. He fled there to the UK, seeking asylum after he was threatened repeatedly by Islamic extremists because he worked for a government-owned oil company. But now, the UK is washing their hands of him, refusing to help because Ahmed was a resident, not a citizen. As a result, the United States wants to send him back to Algeria.

The Algerian intelligence services have told Reprieve that if Ahmed returns, they cannot ensure that he will be safe - from their own personnel. And so Ahmed sits in that steel box, freezing in the constant flow of air-conditioning. The only things in his cell are a Koran and an inch-thick mattress. He is denied even a pen. He has nothing to do but contemplate his fate. Does he resign himself to the likelihood that he will go back to abuse and torture in Algeria? Or does he let himself believe the British